

**MIRROR TO MY THOUGHTS**

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# Mirror to My Thoughts

## Preface

*Mirror to My Thoughts* evolved from three dialogues. It was a sunny Wednesday afternoon and, as I sat meditating my attack on my beloved Apple Crumble, Pete Cobb leaned to my left and asked if I had considered a Doctorate. Naturally I was mildly perplexed at the distraction, but in the same breath intrigued. Could it be simply the right place, the right time? Some weeks earlier, Stanford University were in negotiations with me regarding a visiting professorship for the fall which incorporated a retrospective exhibition curated by Professor Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz. I did the calculations – dates, times, what was required, but, more importantly, whether I was able to intellectually abridge 20 years of practice into a single document that would come to fruition in the same season.

It seemed appropriate.

Some time after Pete Cobb's proposition, I sat in my studio and listed my entire life's work, arranging it into major themes. It was at this point I began to see reflecting back at me a concentrated, complex, thought-provoking resource that was honest and true. Works on identity, perception and degrees of separation were just a few themes that were referenced in a number of key works.

In 2009-10, I was blighted by graduate students sending email requests for images and essays and the fact became clear that a lifetime of work flying solo had not been misspent. Unearthing, compiling, cutting and soul-searching has enabled me to pen this moment in my practice entitled *Mirror to My Thoughts*.



## Acknowledgements

The compilation of 20 years of memory is quite a daunting task with moments of accuracy chipping away at your core moral fibre. *Mirror to My Thoughts* has enabled me to be objective about self and progressive about the new road that I am taking since this document has come into existence.

I would like to thank, Professor Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz for placing my work amongst the finest scholars to have walked Planet Earth; and finally, my late Father – there is not a word or letter that has graced the page without his spiritual authority.

Faisal Abdu'Allah

London 2012

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## Foreword

*Too often, the art produced by Afro-British artists has been framed as being over-sensitive to social issues. Trained as a printmaker, Abdu'Allah's work is imbued with both the texture of the material and the nature of the issues explored within it. These issues recur in different and multifaceted ways: the reconfiguration of community, masculinity, violence and faith. Together they provide a commentary that interrogates the historical and cultural contexts in which images, semantic and visual expressions originate. Abdu'Allah's work reacts against the general assumption that the Afro-British artistic production cannot successfully reconcile social conscience with aesthetic viability. There is a sensibility in his work that affords a gaze at an aesthetic grounded in both an analytical philosophy of popular culture, mass media and Western art history.*

*Faisal's work situates him as the earliest and most accessible single artist of a generation and provides a commentary on the manner in which visual images of Afro-British and Muslim communities, the aesthetic of violence, popular culture sensibility and film have played a critical role in the shaping of contemporary British imagination.*

Professor. Barbaro Martinez- Ruiz

Stanford University



# Introduction

*Mirror to My Thoughts* is a collection of writings that sheds light on my earliest memories in London as a so-called 'third generation', embracing topics, discussions, books, movements and sounds that have shaped my visual arts practice over nearly two decades, from looking at the history of migration influenced by economics and opportunity to how landmark shows curated by Rasheed Araeen – *The Other Story* (1989) – and texts – *The Black Atlantic* (1993) – by Paul Gilroy have helped in shaping my consciousness.

This journey has taken me to many places and spaces but, more importantly, it has enabled the formation of a body of work that can best be described as 'epiphanic'. This account is an attempt to record in loose chronology what my eyes have borne witness to from my earliest memory of visual curiosity in the reading of religious paintings in the home, which enabled me to position myself in the world, creating a critical point of departure from which to construct vocabulary and nurture discernment.

The period covered in this dissertation 1993-2007.

Starting with the Early Years in chapter one which map my childhood influences and euphonies, Chapter two, looking at place and dislocation with the seminal works, *I Wanna Kill Sam* and *Fuck da Police*, (1993), mapping the essence of distrust among the British youth in the late 90s. Chapter three, *Revelations and Last Supper*, (1996) annotations of how this photographic series offered an intimate insight into acts of faith and the myth of pentecostalism. Chapter four, *The Garden of Eden*, (2003) deconstructing the politics of privilege space and identity through the architectural edifice, a collaboration with David Adjaye. Chapter five, *Heads of State*, exploring the plethora of young black men, who had died in tragic circumstances as a result of gun crime in the 1990's and finally Chapter six, *Goldfinger*, questioning ways in which violence has been represented in the history of Western thought and the British mafia's place in the UK communities imagination.

# Chapter 1

## Early Years

*The Negro represents natural man in all his wild and untamed nature. If you want to treat and understand him rightly you must abstract elements of respect and morality and sensitivity – there is nothing remotely humanized in the Negro character ... nothing confirms this more than the reports of the missionaries<sup>1</sup> ...*

800 BC-300 AD saw the hegemony of Kush, also known as the Ethiopian Dynasty, controlling the Valley of The Nile after the conquest of Egypt. A plethora of black and mixed Pharaohs ruled with resolute judgement and parity. Until the 10th Century, Europe was essentially a forest and its main goods for export were wood and fur to the parallel societies of Islam and Byzantium.

A range of scholars besieged our beloved bookshelves with texts about Africa: Carl Linnaeus, Samuel Estwick, Edward Long *et al.* European nations were successful in the exploration of the African interior due to the hosts' knowledge of the local landscape and the colonisers' interpretation of maps. David Livingstone<sup>2</sup> remarked about coming to the African continent as the superior race, irrefutably marking out the relationship early between missionary and host as superior and inferior races. The scramble for Africa was widespread as the land was plundered for its rich minerals and produce.

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<sup>1</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *The Philosophy of History* (1899) in W. D. Wright Critical Reflections on Black History (Westport, CT., USA 2002) 31

<sup>2</sup> Roy.M.McLeod, *Darwins Laboratory*, p.320





Fig.1 Michel de Montaigne, artist unknown (1580)

In 1580, Michel de Montaigne (Fig.1) wrote *On Cannibals*, a text that shaped the visual interpretation of 'otherness', which went against the grain of prevailing judgements. It talked about 'the Noble Savage', a concept which would come to fruition in the 19th century and would later be synonymous with the African. This account would construct the terms of endearment that some 450 years later would furnish the incongruous framework of black ontology. A more interesting detail is that of Europe citing itself as the light of the world and ark of knowledge even though its very own existence was reliant on the minerals from the land of 'the Noble Savage'.

The year is 1952 in Clarendon, Jamaica and my father is asleep in his bed, the night was not unusual until he was awoken by a man perched on a chair in his room. They spoke for sometime but my father (Fig.2) was slightly perplexed, was he dreaming or was this fidelity?



Fig.2 George Duffus, Passport Photograph (1955)

But one thing he was very sure about, was who he was with. The man looking at him was unshaven but had a cool burnt brass complexion, it was Jesus. He then remonstrated to my father that he was to give up drinking, gambling and give his life over to the Lord. My father from this point embraced the faith of pentecostalism and became Paster George Duffus, the eloquent minister of Leghorn Road Baptist Church, London.

The man that would prophecy, evangelise to his terrestrial congregation but would also rebuke the order of the celestial world when filled with the holy ghost, until his dying day.

At this time the dreaded smog reigned over London and provided a bleak backdrop for my father who travelled in search of a better life. When my mother finally arrived some months after, they were quickly exposed to numerous individuals and organisations who were not at all comfortable with their presence. Landlords were happy to openly display their intentions on their windows.



Fig.3 No Irish, Photograph, photographer unknown (1961)

Enoch Powell 'Rivers of Blood' speech from 1968 had blighted the consciousness of the British public. The sickly ideological hypothesis detailed in Powell's imbecilic public disquisition was a response to the new Race Relations act of 1968 by the Labour government, which was primarily to improve housing for the new immigrant cohort. My father recalls ascending the stairs of tenements and seeing grey cards scrawled, sometimes with lipstick, 'No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs' (Fig.3), and he would descend in an expedient fashion with his self-esteem firmly below his weather-beaten brogues, Powell's 43,000 letters of support were clearly manifesting at grass roots level.

My earliest memories of home were full of fun and experimentation in the 70's, space was an issue and I soon realised that I could create space when I laid out my carefully rendered cartoon caricatures and paintings around the home.

I utilised my childhood surroundings as inspiration, especially in the home. My walls were adorned with copies of paintings depicting a handsome white male with blonde hair and blue eyes, unlike the one my father described to me in his vision. Despite this he would ceremoniously turn to this picture as he left the house daily and uttered supplications for safety and deliverance.

Looking back, I tried to reconcile this ritual with the culture of fear and the premium of obedience. If I adhered to all the rules in the book translated at the time of King James I, I would be worthy of a place on the left side of God with copious amounts of milk and honey on the day of judgement. This was the melancholy of childhood.

In 1985 I created my first formal painting under the auspice of my art teacher Mr May, an ardent fan of Miles Davis and Chuck Close. The brief for our art project was 'the expression of fear'. For inspiration I recalled my first memory of deep seated trepidation and it was a Saturday afternoon at the dinning table and my father was discussing the end of the world and how imminent it was. Using this experience I painted *Armageddon*, bright hues thickly applied in water-colour. The painting initiated numerous conversations and critiques amongst my art teachers but also members of the staff from other disciplines. I soon realised Paul Gauguin was right that art was either plagiarism or revolution.<sup>3</sup> It was a part of my life that needed no introduction, Mr May expedited my application for a foundation degree at the Harrow School of Art and I swiftly embraced my new sense of purpose and direction despite my parents desire for me to be a Doctor.

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<sup>3</sup> Huneker, James "Pathos of Distance", p. 128, *Art of Every Individual*



Fig.3a Faisal Abdu'Allah, Armageddon, Watercolour (1988)

My foundation year was like the time between underground stations, I was already preparing my portfolio for my bachelor arts degree application, placing Central Saint Martins as my first choice, it was my only choice. To my parents surprise I was awarded a place and in my state of euphoria purchased my first pair of Levis Jeans and Doctor Martins. The first year Paul Duffus (as I was known then) was the romantic bohemian artist that was fascinated by Degar, Escher and Klee. All cultural references were based on the western art system that reserved no place for black modernity.

In my second year at Central Saint Martins, I travelled to the USA on a student exchange to the Massachusetts College of Art which would transform my entire arts practice, through a haircut, a breakfast and a wedding. After four weeks in Boston I was in dire need of a haircut so I ventured down town thinking that I would foolishly find a salon that specialised in my type of hair. I grew tired as the sun was setting but I was still full of youthful determination. I stopped numerous young black men, until finally a middle aged man with

cocoa brown skin, wearing a Boston Red Sox baseball cap directed me to Danny's the pride of Boston.

The morning after my tonsorial exploration, Kriss Bell, a close friend sat with me over breakfast before our painting class and commented on my haircut. He informed me that he was also was adept with a pair of clippers and he had no problem being my personal barber. Our friendship blossomed, every morning Kriss had more pearls of wisdom to impart, he spoke about NAACP<sup>4</sup>, black nationalism, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, but most importantly the two most prominent movements, The Harlem Renaissance citing Norman Lewis, W.E.B Dubois, and the Black Arts Movement in London that I knew very little about. Kriss was amazed at my level of ignorance and provided me with books on Aubrey Williams and Frank Bowling, this formed the basis of my dissertation that I was writing at the time.

Watching Kriss cut and debate in his dormitory was a live performance, which would take me back to those early years of watching and waiting in my local barbershop as a child. But more importantly what the barber shop meant to the community, being more than just a space of trade but a place to share the experiences, the one in particular that of black men. Near the end of the first semester Kriss injured his shoulder in a basketball game and insisted I cut his hair, I became his personal barber until I returned to England.

Some weeks later Kriss and I went to a wedding, he came home to change for the reception and whilst looking for a pair of shoes under his bed he found a book that he thought was important for my dissertation. He kicked the book from under his bed which slid and hit the side of my foot, I looked down and he asked me if I had read it. With great

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<sup>4</sup> Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest civil rights organization, from voting rights to education, thousands of dedicated members make up the NAACP to insure the continued fight for social justice for all Americans.

British diplomacy I kicked it back and said I did not read black power literature as it only isolates people. He kicked it back and on the third effort I picked it up and scanned the front.

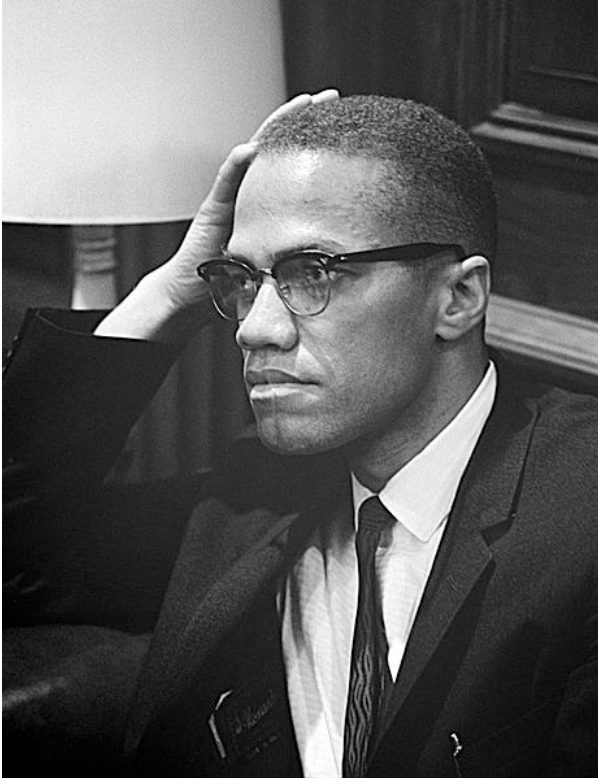


Fig.4 Marion S. Trikosko, *Malcolm X*, Photograph, (1964)

On the cover there was a colour photograph of light skinned man, neatly groomed with an enchanting gaze. The title was *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (Fig.4) I had heard good things about this book, I read it within a week.

After my time in the USA on a student exchange, I returned to Central Saint Martins in London no longer the romantic bohemian that was selfishly obsessed with abstract notions of line and form. Now an articulate, politically charged young nineteen-year-old, with a new artistic language and fresh approach to modernity, now Black Modernity according to Paul Gilroy <sup>5</sup>.

It was self evident that the first generation of artists, Frank Bowling, Aubrey Williams, and Rasheed Araeen came to Britain as practitioners who were clearly on the crest of the wave of post war decolonisation<sup>6</sup> when they arrived. The second wave of the late 1970s and early 1980s was Eddie Chambers, Claudette Johnson and Keith Piper who formed the BLK Art Group which came into existence because of the ethnocentric parochialism of the British art education system.

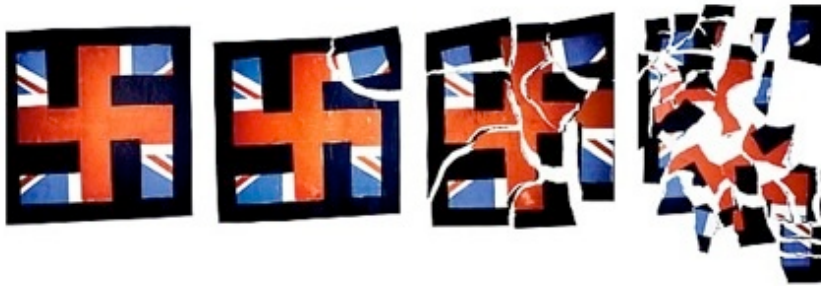


Fig.5 Eddie Chambers, *Destruction of the National Front*, Collage (1990)

Chambers seminal work (Fig.5) incorporated elegantly modernists tropes of collage and cubism, but more importantly reflected a global discontent of western imperialism, from the unrest in South Africa to the streets of Northern Ireland.

This second generation of young artists, revitalised a revelatory role for black art in opposition to western modernism. They were inspired by the aesthetics and content of

<sup>5</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*. P.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hall. *Assembling the 90's*.p.5



their first generational peers, but also the 1960s US Black Arts Movement, writings of Malcolm X and Amiri Baraka. This sense of collective creative purpose inspired my first series of screen prints with found images of Malcolm X on paper. (Fig.6)



Fig.6 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *No Sell Out*, Screen Print on Paper (1990)

The colour palette of *No Sell Out* suggested several symbolic themes that was being articulated in street attire and in the vernacular of Hip Hop, red for the blood shed in the slave trade, black for the colour of our skin and green for the promised land of the African continent. Showing Malcolm X as a type of hero in disguise counters the authoritative and hypercritical texts and reviews of the era which portrayed him as an extremist who preached racism, black supremacy and xenophobia. Contrary his ideas of self defence were misconstrued as violence, despite inspiring the US Black Arts Movement, The Black Power Movement and the Black is Beautiful slogan.

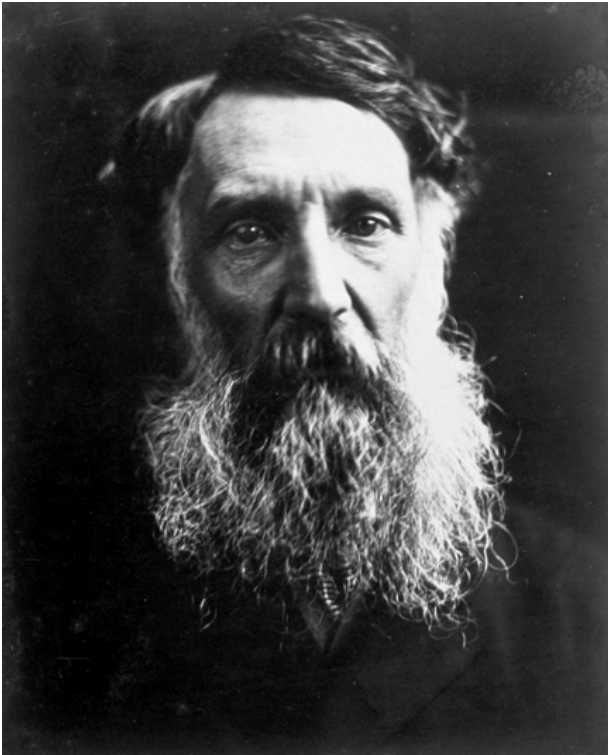


Fig.7 Julia Margaret Cameron, Eyre, Photograph (1867)

The Malcolm X photographs were composed using a typology similar to that employed by Julia Margaret Cameron, (Fig.7) whom posed her models in front of the camera with a black backdrop that helped to dramatise the subject and suggest a new physiological dimension.

Her taxonomical approach with her subjects were to play an important role as I made my departure from found images to selecting my own models and different lighting approaches.

One Friday evening my nephew was on his way home from school and was stopped by an elderly man Mr Aaron, who ran the local barber shop. He inquired about my nephews fancy hair style that depicted a New York skyline on the side and back of his cranium. In between his youthful slurps on his Ribena he replied to Mr Aaron that his uncle had cut the design but he was at university and would not be home until the evening. Later that night I was summoned to his shop and after a long discussion I had a Saturday job. City Barbers

was in the heart of Harlesden, a predominately afro caribbean and Irish community that lived side by side in total harmony post Windrush. My first day was daunting as the activity I did for fun had financial and personal ramifications. It became clear that the barber was the fountain of knowledge, pillar of a community but more importantly a witness to the evolution of ideas, policy and contemporary cultural attitudes.

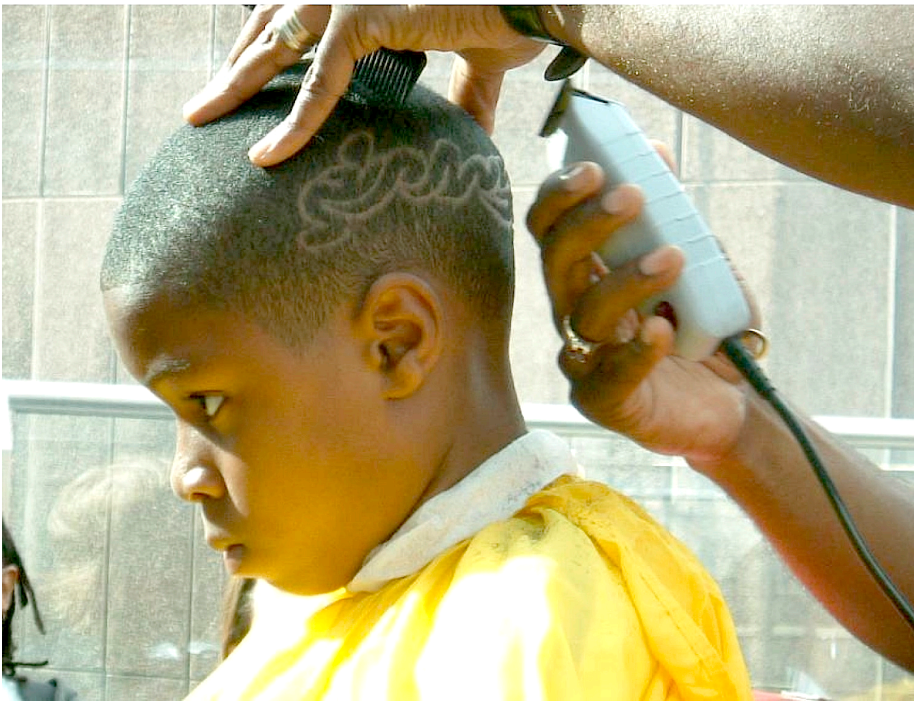


Fig.8 Marianne Mulvey, Untitled, Photograph (2009)

Now standing in the heart of my community, listening to De La Soul, James Brown and the controversial Ninja Man, it was clear that Hegel would add volumes to his current diatribe on the Negro.

The 90s saw the rise and fall of two reggae icons on British soil, Beenie Man and Shabba Ranks, berated for the lyrical content of their songs as propagating the literary slaying of the gay community and all that it was associated with. As can be imagined, this became the latest topic of discussion in the barber shop to see if the comments could unearth any

covert homosexual patrons. It was clear a number of my clients were of this orientation, but would not involve themselves in the discussion, resorting to a passive participation and providing digressive scenarios rather than answers. Flashbacks to the falsities of Hegel's essay in my terse rebuttals to clients soon earned me the title of 'gay sympathiser'.

On Saturday in the local barber-shop, it would be clear how the experience of the two worlds that I was actively a part of had to interface. The Barber shop felt like a public Front Room and the and my art studio felt like the Private Room, I had to dissolve the two into one.

My weekly events at the RCA in the seminars and discussions about the merits of iconography were playing over and over in my mind.

In the studio I was denigrating the surface of my prints in my response to society but primarily in the quest to un-earth a material that could withstand my methodical cuts and interventions. The issues of permanence plagued my thoughts as I recalled the Cy Twombly drawing I had seen that was destructive and productive. Paper Ends self entitled earmarked an important transition from paper to metal. An example of dematerialisation but more importantly the nostalgia of losing a surface.

David Hammons (Fig.9) explored an electric written style in his work Spirit Writing 2004. This type of approach stemmed from the Pentecostal and Revival religious traditions in Jamaica.

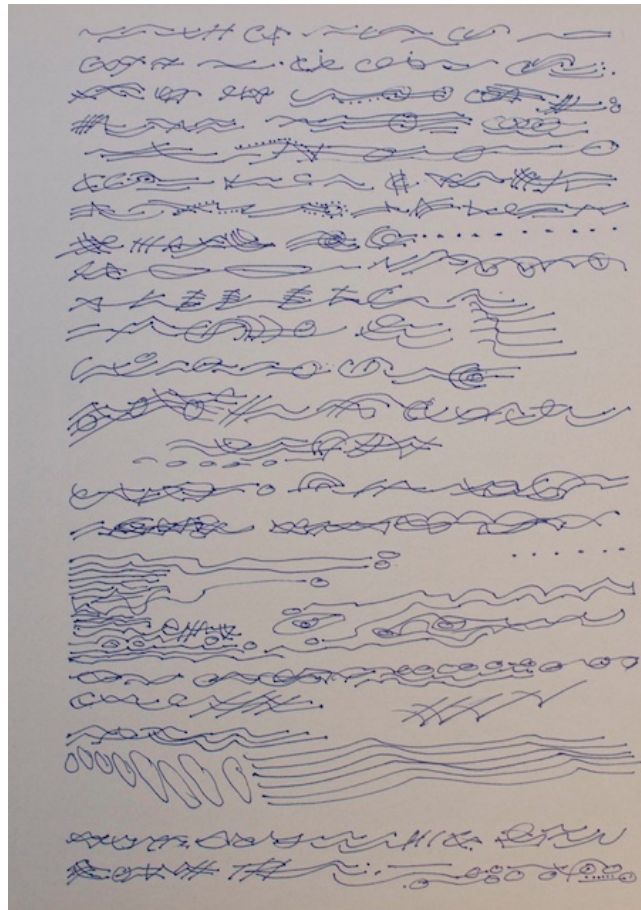


Fig.9. David Hammons. *Spirit Writing*, Drawing on paper (1989)

In Revival churches, such electric writing is strongly associated with God's pulsation, which manifests in an infinity zigzagging as a way to contain his vitality. My evangelical approach also had a strong connection with Central African forms of graphic expression seen throughout the Caribbean in which such writing represents the ancestors' activities.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Salah M. Hassan and Cheryl Finley, eds. *Diaspora Memory Place*. Munich-Berlin-London-New York: Prestel Press, 2008. P. 2.





Fig.10 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Paper Ends*, Mixed media (1990)

The burns in *Paper Ends* (Fig.10) harked back to the *Armageddon* painting from my early years that symbolised death but also a spiritual purification. The surface of the print with applied mixed media annotated the pathological attempt to escape the realm of physicality through the marked gesture. My recollections of making the print was plagued by this sense of helplessness, but the process help inaugurate a new cycle that would incorporate the use of alternative surfaces besides paper.

The pauses when I could stop talking to the customers whilst shaving them, gave me moments to reflect and consolidate: was Mies van der Rohe a genius, or lucky? Was G.W.F. Hegel correct in his observations, as he remonstrates about the merits of the negro exhibiting the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> G. W. F. Hegel *The Philosophy of History* (1899), trans. J. Jibree, New York: Dover (1956) p.93.

In a South London Mosque on a Friday evening Paul Duffus as I was known then took his Shahadah and became Faisal Abdu'Allah witnessed by several friends performed by Imam Ishmael completing my reversion, which had taken me from a collective religiosity towards a more intense spiritual consciousness.

I began the Royal College of Art as Faisal Abdu'Allah in 1991, robed in my white Jalabiya,<sup>9</sup> neatly cropped beard and as radical as Malcolm x on ecstasy. In my transition I had become well versed in the writings of W.E.B Dubois, Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer who was the only author to address the aesthetic problems of Afro British artists.<sup>10</sup>

Thalatha Haqq (Fig.11) was the first sculptural work on glass made after my reversion, in this piece my transformative fragile state is merged with an identity that is translucent and fragile.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.mideastweb.org/Middle-East-Encyclopedia/jalabiya.htm> Is a traditional Arab garment worn by both males and females

<sup>10</sup> Iconography after identity, pg. 49-58

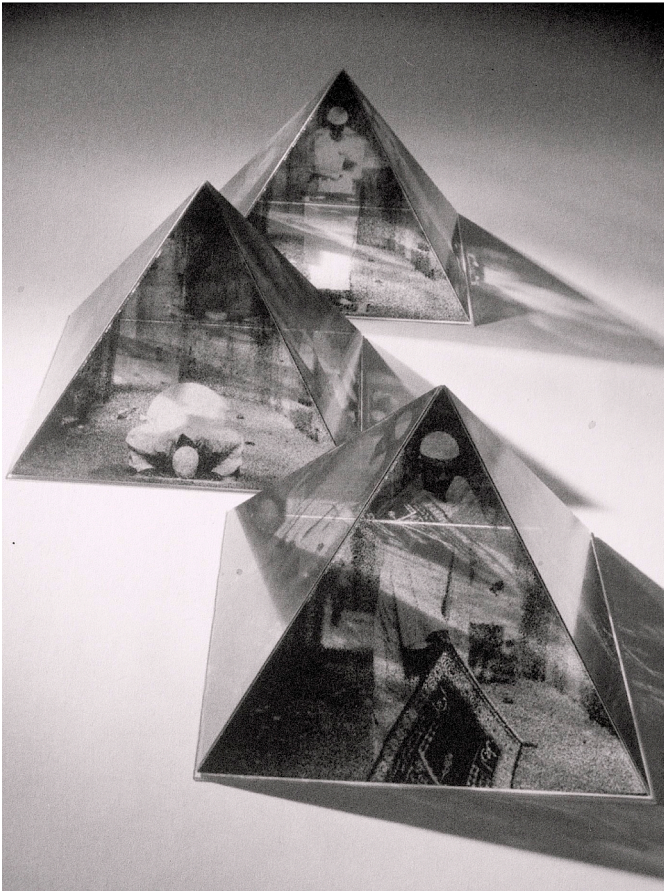


Fig.11 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Thalatha Haqq*, Screen Print on Glass (1992)

Photographed at sunrise two blocks from the Picasso museum in Barcelona, I appear in my traditional Islamic raiment tranquil and humble. A triptych annotates the three positions of prayer where you see a public display of my faith and dislocation, being out of time and out of place.





Fig.12 Frank Bowling, *Dog Days (A To A)* (1971)

This weaving together of Africa, America and Europe was at the heart of this work very similar to Frank Bowling's transnational dislocated experience in the US that he painted.<sup>11</sup> Heavily influenced by formal abstract expressionism by the likes of Clement Greenberg, my own personal affiliation with Bowling was the position that he occupied. Often named in the same canon with Aubrey Williams (Caribbean Art Movement)<sup>12</sup> Bowling never really occupied or exhibited under this political agency, but adopted a position of autonomy. *Dog Days* (Fig.12 ) embraced a colour palette that scribed a transcendent interdependence with his new adopted space. The handling of acrylic loosely applied created seamless dialogue between the pigments leaving the viewer unable to locate themselves in the heart of his topography.

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<sup>11</sup> Afro Modern, pg. 262

<sup>12</sup> The Caribbean Arts Movement set up in 1966 by Kamau Braithwaite, Andrew Salkey, and publisher John La Rose, reflected the temper of the times - drawing inspiration from the works of international revolutionary writers.

## 2

### ***I Wanna Kill Sam***

Hellbent addressing the factual inaccuracies that had visually seduced society about my body in the popular landscape. Using my own image as the point of departure, I invited some close associates who shared a similar philosophy and angst to a photo shoot. It was apparent I had been raised on a visual diet of monuments that remind us of young men who fought for our freedom and liberty, but clearly ignored the participation of the 'other brothers'.

Moving images asserted perceptions of the highly eroticised or savage black body, which made more important my reason for creating visually coded rebuttals that would serve a community whose voice of protest was silent. It was clear, that artists of other ethnicities were making the same work that I was, however in the analysis of their work any racial content was deemed as incidental.

On the 3rd March 1991 Rodney King's white Hyundai car was stopped by traffic officers of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) after a high-speed chase. King, whose friends "Pooh" Allen and Freddie Helms were also in the vehicle, had been drinking and were behaving erratically. Ordering King out of the vehicle, the officers, Laurence Powell, Timothy Wind, Theodore Brines and Stacey Koon then proceeded to repeatedly hit Mr King with their batons.



Fig.13 George Holliday, *Rodney King* (1991)

Other officers at the scene did not intervene in the assault and as a consequence King received a fractured skull and had internal bleeding. Unbeknown to the police, the incident was caught on camera by George Holliday, (Fig.13) a manager of a plumbing company, whose apartment was close by.

Within days the incident was world news and, on the 15th March, the tape was running on news networks around the world, focusing international attention on the apparent brutality of the LAPD. King was cleared and four officers charged with assault. Widespread rioting followed after the officers' acquittal in April 1992 and this resulted in 55 deaths, 2,000 injured and over 12,000 arrests. Sergeant Stacey Koon later received a 30-month jail term although the LAPD claimed the officers had acted in self-defence to restrain King, who they said was aggressive when being arrested.

This level of unrest was not helped by a Korean-American shopkeeper being handed a lenient sentence in the Autumn of 1991 regarding the shooting of a young, black, defenceless woman in his store. The emotive CCTV footage of her last seconds as she slumped to the floor with a single shot left me empty.



Fig.14 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Fuck da Police* (1992)

*Fuck Da Police* (Fig.14) was created as a response to these global of social trauma, seeking to both represent and explore the tension between social trends informed by racism. In other words, the work challenged existing representations of cultural, ethnic, religious and national identity groups. *Fuck Da Police* took its title from the American vernacular of violence and popular verbal phrasing about police brutality in the 1990s.

*Fuck Da Police* was the first work on metal, inspired by the influential hip-hop group N.W.A.'s 1988 anthem, eloquently articulating the rage felt by many African American men due to the racial profiling in urban centres especially Los Angeles.

Serving as a permanent memorial to the nameless victims of police violence and racism.





Fig.15 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *I Wanna Kill Sam* (1993)

*I Wanna Kill Sam'* Uncle was my first collaboration with the rappers, *Scientist of Sound*. Based in West London, the group was made up of four members, Raham, Hasan, Sadik and Akil. (Fig.15)



Fig.16 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Khalil*, Screen Print on Metal (1993)

Numerous critics implied that I was merely turning the table of race and representation by re-enforcing the stereotypical perceptions and that I was the Devil wearing Prada! The difficulty in creating a work and a space for critical dialogue and objective exchange is dependent on the time you are in.



Fig.17 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Akil*, Screen Print on Metal (1993)



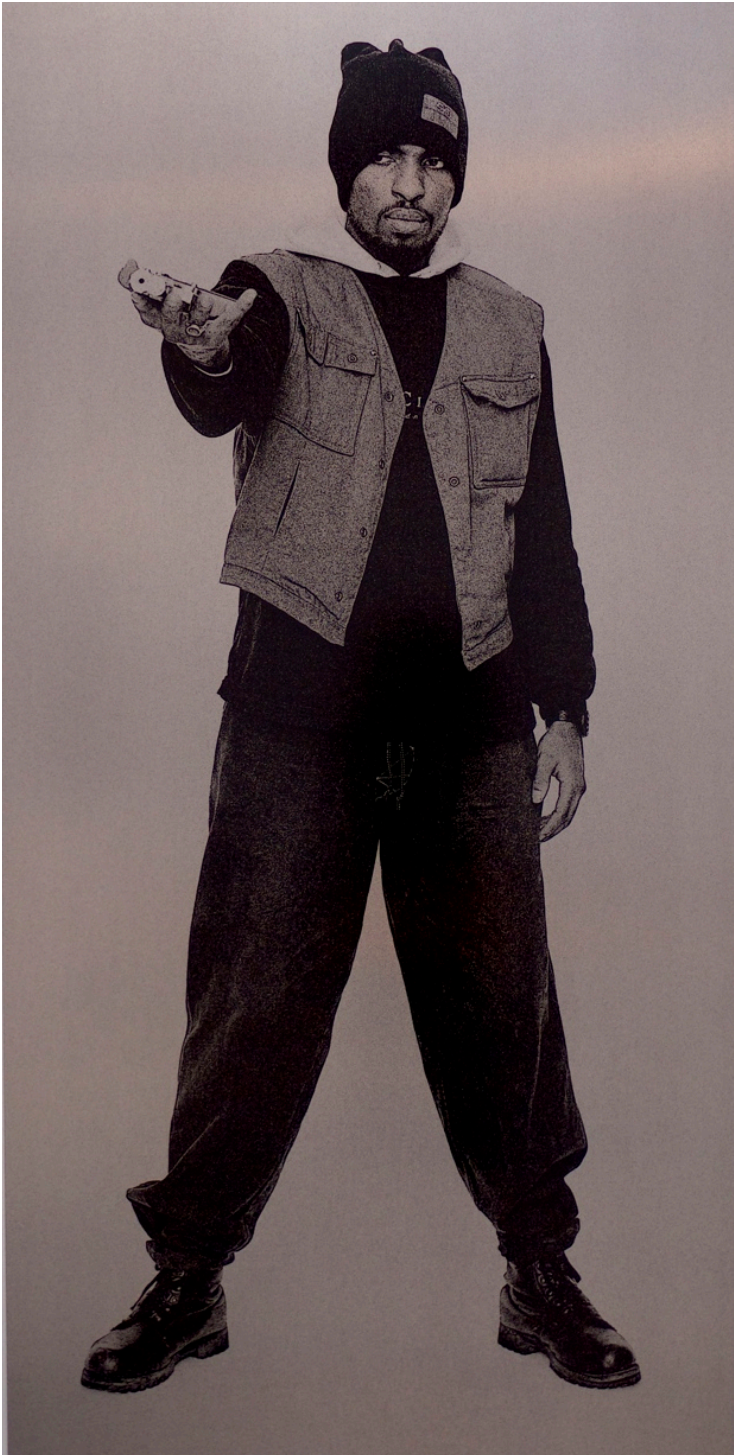


Fig.18 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Hasan*, Screen Print on Metal (1993)

Ice Cube's album *Death Certificate* lyrical content mirrored the Black British experience, it reflected the hope, aspiration and deception of the system. The images of *Scientists of Sound* more importantly included all their imperfections and attitude. Despite being purveyors of the Smith and Weston hand gun and the embodiment of the stereotypical



urban gangster who appeared to have declared war on white British society one could see a mustard seed of truth in this.

## 3

***Revelation and The Last Supper***

*Just as Abdu'Allah's practice is imbricated in their lives, so our presence is sutured into a lingering moment. Firearms, used for both offence and protection, upset the well-known narrative. A simultaneous sense of confrontation and defence ensues in which the viewer is inescapably implicated. Assumptions based on clothing, skin colour and faith unravel and a familiar composition is fundamentally destabilised.<sup>13</sup>*

*I Wanna Kill Sam* series singled me out as a young black radical artist that was supposed to be hell-bent on denigrating the modernist ocular vocabulary re-established by Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Korbena Mercer *et al.* It was now 1996 and in those three years the dust had settled and there was clearly no love lost between myself, the emerging community and new allegiances. However, I was becoming acutely aware the realisation of being informally ostracized from the fold (if such a thing existed) this enabled greater freedom of thought, execution and rationalism in my practice. My retrospective look at Uncle Sam was frustrating at this time but yet compounded my desire to develop an alchemical transformative theory.

**The Press**

Many evenings were misspent as I pondered my next move. The words of Sarah Kent were indelibly emblazoned in Time Out magazine as the 'next one to watch'.<sup>14</sup> This was based on my first solo show *Censored Nigger to Nubian*, which was shown at the 198 Gallery in Brixton shortly after my Royal College of Art graduation show. Dean Ricketts

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<sup>13</sup> Rachel Newman *The Art of Dislocation*, p. 2010

<sup>14</sup> Sarah Kent, Time Out, p. 1993

from the Watchmen Agency ran the article in the Face and sent Kofi Allen to photograph me. Kofi and I instantly found a common ground and he suggested if I ever wanted to collaborate, just call him.

Then the moment of pure epiphany, I was seated in my aunt's front room, waiting for her to bring me some good news about a family member, possibly a wedding. Dr Michael Macmillan in his seminal historicisation of Black British culture observed that the traditional first generation West Indian's sitting-room was a space of hosting and cerebral contemplation<sup>15</sup>. , highlights the significance of this space. In this study, McMillan draws upon memories of his relatives' homes in the 1960s and 1970s to show his vision of the traditional 'West Indian' front room and the symbolism of particular objects. McMillan examines how these rooms raised the issues of class, migration, aspiration, religion, alienation, religion was my calling.

My eyes moved seriously around the room as they do. Looking at all the family photographs, my aunt's heinous colour sense and spatial coordination always made me chuckle. But on a wall near the window was a traditional icon of my generation. It was in my home, but also in the home of every God-fearing Jamaican – *The Lord's Last Supper*. A colourful tapestry, which was riveting and distasteful in the same breath, it represented a frozen moment in which one became engulfed as a silent participant. My mind started to race and make dots on an imaginary page – 1, 2, 3, 4. My breathing became heavy as I delved deeper into thought about this work I was trying to comprehend. Slowly trying to connect the marks on this imaginary page, Stanley Spencer's *Last Supper* (1920) flashes up, taking an unusual place on my imaginary page.

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<sup>15</sup> The Front Room: Migrant Aesthetics in the Home (2009)

The disciples in Spencer painting (Fig.19) are playfully lined up, almost as dolls, looking on at the moment Jesus breaks the bread.



Fig.19 Stanley Spencer, *Last Supper*. Oil Painting (1920)

The cramped space in which Jesus and his disciples sit is actually a malt-house in Cookham, Spencer's beloved childhood home. I receive another series of flash's: Da Vinci, then Warhol and, finally, my picture is complete with Marisol Escobar's (Fig.20) sculpted *Last Supper* (1982-84) which was vaguely reminiscent of my early years.



Fig.20 Marisol Escobar, *Last Supper*. (1982-84)

My aunt returned with the news but I was in a trance, similar to the one my father experienced in 1968, I had just seen my next work, *The Last Supper*. The Pentecostal background that I loathed since my time of enlightenment had returned once again to remind me of my spiritual earnest, I made the call to Kofi.

## **The Last Supper and Revelation**

*This fascination with the body continued through the Revelation where I was looking more internally at the historical conditioning of the gaze and popular icons. Raised in a strict Pentecostal household the iconography that was around as I arrived home from school, walked into the house and ascended the stairs, and before going to bed were the eyes of Christ. Watching over me with the promise of eternal life as long as I surrender my soul to this man, image or construct. These images were etched in my sub-consciousness as a child before speech had any authority, hence the stance of being close at school to all that*



*looked like the saviour on my wall. After all, my sisters were burning their hair to look like his, so he must be the image of purity.*<sup>16</sup>



Fig.21 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *The Last Supper I*, Print on Paper (1996)

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<sup>16</sup> Communication with Faisal Abdu'allah, Stanford University, 2010.



Fig.22 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *The Last Supper II*, Print on Paper (1996)

In these pieces, (Fig.22) I engaged in an exchange with classical art historical pieces which have also clearly influenced the history of photography. At first glance, the careful posing of the people in the photos created a feeling of having documented a single moment in time. Like in Wenceslaus Hollar's etchings *The Bowing Gentleman* and *Lady with a Houpette*, (Fig.23) I photographed my subjects in full costume, paying particular attention to highlighted details such as the gun, the ring and the religious garments as well as elements symbolic of status including emblems of labor such as boots, popular fashion icons like baseball caps and coats and domestic references like the wooden bowl.





Fig.23 Wenceslaus Hollar's etchings The Bowing Gentleman and Lady with a Houpette

The embodiment of such visual symbols speaks to the way in which popular culture is transformed visually and coded using the body as medium and in which beauty, politics, cultural identity and leisure are realised largely as intellectual achievements of the vernacular culture.

The second level of engagement with the traditional religious legacy of western art history is a deliberate association with Leonardo Da Vinci's famous Last Supper. The Last Supper's symbolic sharing of a religious and spiritual legacy alludes not only to Western religious tradition but negotiates a new type of inclusion within the realm of religious artwork and advocates that discourse around issues of hybridity, creolisation and syncretism.



## 4

### ***The Garden of Eden***

*The edifice and the word are one and indivisible*<sup>17</sup>

*Garden of Eden* was the comprehensive shift in which the reliance on image for metaphor and signifier of content was no longer utilised. Now the simple elements of light and science were the tools that conceptually navigated a curious audience. The human genome of eye colour became a factor that dictated the space the audience were privileged to enter.

A firm believer that we live in the same world, but live in different, parallel worlds, was always my Achilles' heel. Looking through the lens of momentary privilege and opulence that arts practice naturally embraces, one can't help but wonder when does this ride come to end.

We were reminded in *The Matrix* taking the blue pill or the red, at a cross road in ones life will either enable you to stay in the mire of your own ignorance as humanity propels you into the every day slavery. The red pill symbolic of the motivation for discovering truth; the blue pill is the response you want to hear.

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<sup>17</sup> Carlos Kucharek, *Blueprint*, p34. 2003

Stepping off the train at Linz station, this was my Matrix, a 3-day revelation that the other world does exist. Judging by the gaze that was afforded to me as a commuter on the national rail by its inhabitants, it was a flashback as if I were the gift for Prince Henry on Portuguese soil some 500 years ago. An object of wonder, disgust and currency, I summarised my feelings in my note book in the safety of my hotel room after my ordeal. I dropped my head and just put pen to paper so that as much detail could be recounted on that evening's events alighting the train.

*It's 11.58 pm as the train coasts into Linz. I rise to check my reflection and straighten my tie. I clasp my hand luggage and attempt to appreciate the Austrian vista. Skirmishing with difficulty against the laws of refraction and reflection, I can only make out shaved craniums approaching my exit. Like binary fission they multiply, each similar in height, weight and motion. As the door throws back I am saluted by Austria's Combat 18. As I walk through the line they have created for my heroic welcome, they chant in unison Ku Klux Klan <sup>18</sup>*

Epiphanies happen in the most unexpected places and moments. *The Garden of Eden* (Fig.24) was realised in this moment of fragile anguish. Variance played out through the host in the oral tradition enabled my experience to inform the architectural edifice that would seduce the public through my factor of a conceptualised difference.

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<sup>18</sup> LKW, artist essay, p. 2000

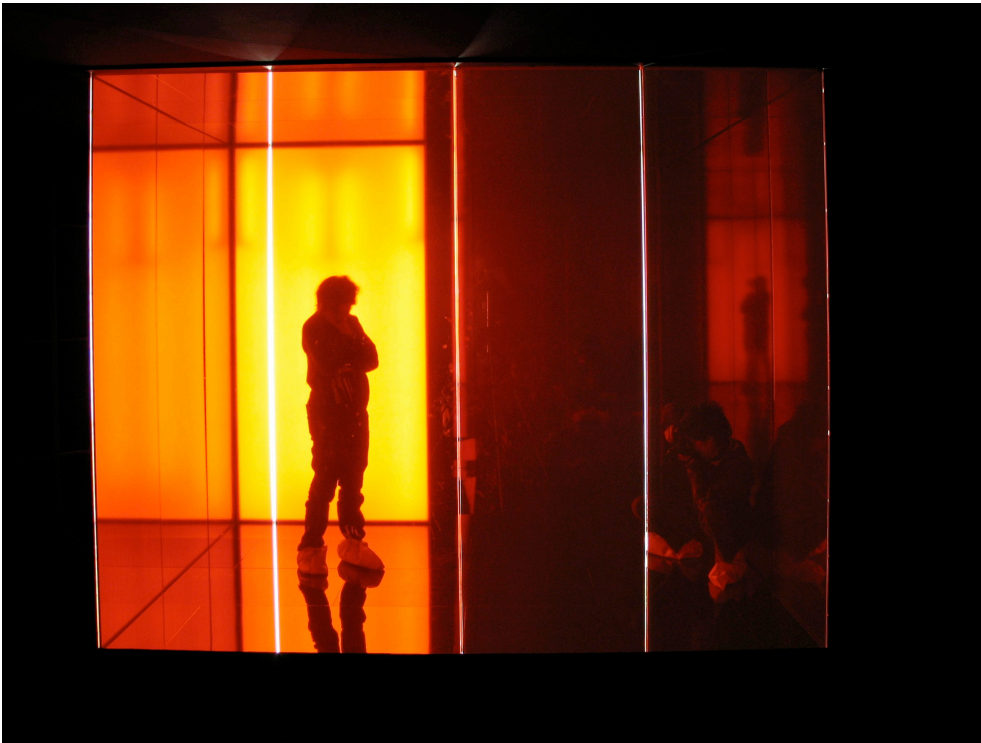


Fig.24 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *The Garden of Eden*, 2006

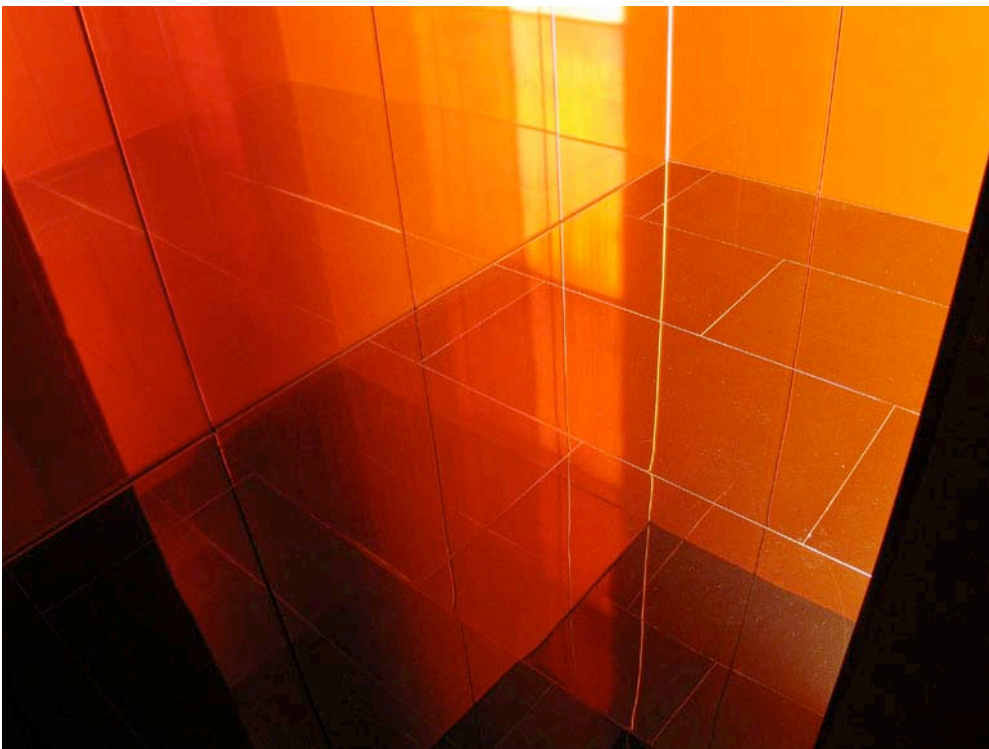


Fig.25 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *The Garden of Eden* (Interior) (2006)

*The black space of The Garden of Eden is a metaphor for the body; the body of Abdu'Allah as external to the internal; the glass cube as heart-beat where sound and light is muted and refracted. Refracted performatively, the work is about movement and how we navigate crossing liminal boundaries that question the meaning and experience of difference. Just as in the song The Bottle, by the poet Gil Scott Heron, The Garden of Eden is a metaphor for our mortality and political isolation as our bodies navigate physical and imagined space, witnessed through sight. The eye is not only a tool of discernment but also a medium of exchange and a nucleus of who we are<sup>19</sup>.*

*Garden of Eden* marked a comprehensive shift where the image was no longer the metaphor and signifier of content but just light and our human genome, that of eye colour. The human body becomes central to the Garden as it charges the void with the presence of the human form. Collaborating with David Adjaye was of primary importance as it enabled Adjaye the God space to realise the traumatic experience on the dreaded night in Linz through the installation, and also heighten the socially engaged element of the work.”<sup>20</sup>

The extremity of the disparity of spaces and the restricted access to each unique space determined by eye color mirrored the extreme social situation of racism. A similar kind of conceptual understanding is visible in the site-specific installation *Passage* exhibited in 2009 at LAXART, Los Angeles by artist Walead Beshty.

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<sup>19</sup> Dr Michael McMillan *The Garden of Eden*, 2005

<sup>20</sup> Personal communication with Faisal Abdu'allah, Stanford University, 2010.



Fig.26 Waleed Beshty, *Passage*, Photograph (2009)

Beshty's work (Fig.26) focuses on the idea of artistic materialization, particularly through photography, depending on random occurrence as a mode of transformation, a process he called 'brute materiality.'<sup>21</sup> His prints are the result of radical changes in the physical properties of the films caused by exposure to X rays, the mishandling of the luggage and the opening of the film by security. The concern around recording the material condition of the structure at a particular point in time is one that Beshty and I share as artists, one characterized by increased globalization and the sense of a possible new order, an opportunity to explore metaphysical, political and psychological crossroads.

*The Garden of Eden* also used text as a primary conceptual tool, a form of verbal support designed to frame specific ideological responses to physical enclosures conditioned by the verbal references conveyed through the text. In this piece, a dialogue between the "Neo" and "Morpheus" characters, as re-phrased. In the dialogue I replaced certain key words from the original script, those that I viewed as most relevant to the experience or process of artistic cognition.

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<sup>21</sup> Douglas Fogle, *Creamier: Contemporary Art in Culture*, pp. 46-49.

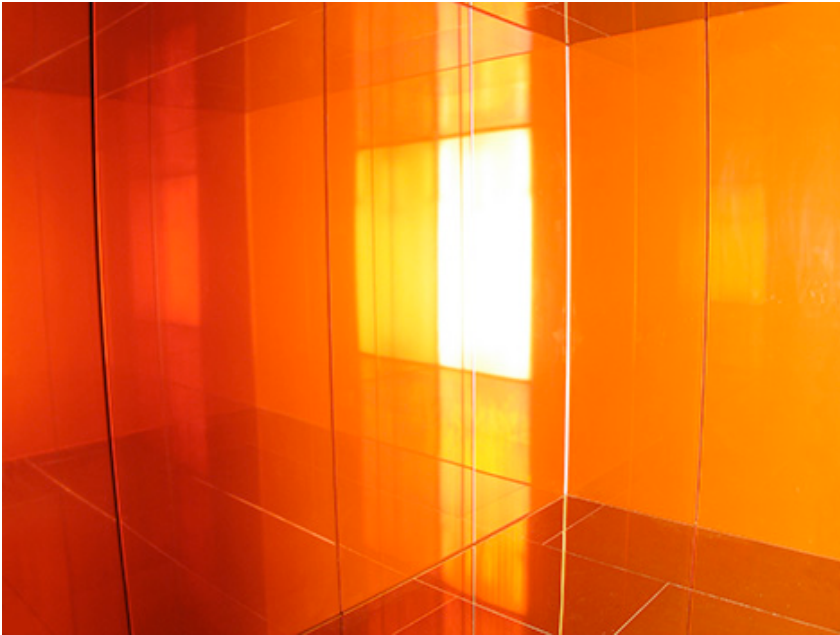


Fig. 27 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *The Garden of Eden* (2006)

*In doing so, Abdu'Allah turns a conceptual text of publicly consumed, and thus accessible, media into an ideological reference to the lack and openness around themes common across his work such as race and violence.*<sup>22</sup>

On the floor of the Garden it read:

"It is an honor to meet you.

I imagine that right now you are feeling like Alice, tumbling down the rabbit-hole? Hmm? I can see it in your eyes.

You have the look of a man who accepts what he sees because he is expecting to wake up. Ironically this is not far from the truth.

Do you believe in fate?

No.

Why not?

I don't like the idea that I'm not in control of my own life.

I know exactly what you mean.

Let me tell you why you're here. You're here because you know something.

What you know you can't explain, but you feel it.

You felt it your entire life. That there's something wrong with the world.

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<sup>22</sup> Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz On the Art of Dislocation, p.276

You don't know what, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind driving you mad.

It is this feeling that has summoned you before me.

Do you know what I'm talking about?

Do you know what it is?

The Garden is everywhere, it is all around us, even now in this very room you"<sup>23</sup>

The concept of lyrical fragmentation is explored as the script from *Matrix* is remixed incorporating Hip Hop idiom, a manner of short hand capable of representing a vernacular philosophy and state of mind<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Text re-phrased by Abdu'Allah from the original script of *The Matrix* film. *The Matrix*: Dirs. Andy and Lana Wachowski. Perf. Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, and Carrie-Anne Moss. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> See for example, the use of lyrics by Tupac Shakur in *Last Supper*; from Notorious B.I.G.'s 1997 album 'Life after Death' in *Head of State*; from Lauryn Hill's 1999 album 'Miseducation of Lauryn Hill' in *Revelations*; and from Jay-Z's 2003 album 'Black' in *Garden of Eden*.

## 5

### ***Heads of State***

Paul Callum bids me farewell – the clenched touch, fist to fist, is the urban gentleman's handshake. He walks outside, mobile pressed hard to his left ear and nonchalantly jumps into his car. He is off for the weekend. Unfortunately, this was his last weekend above ground. Stopping at a fast-food shop for a late lunch, he was confronted by assailants who attempted to relieve him of a gold chain he was wearing. A handgun went off. Paul slumped to the floor with chain intact as his robbers fled empty-handed. He was two days on life support, but his injuries were far too severe for him to come round. The angels called him home, an innocent man just minding his own and raising a family.

Paul's murder would be the first of many over a number of years. My thoughts and feelings had no room for reconciliation or rest. Frustrated at the loss of young life and the ineffectual investigations by the London Metropolitan Police, *Heads of State* came into being.

*Heads of State* showcased in the late 90s and dealt with the violence in the community where I resided, rested and played. The media would categorise the problem as 'black on black', as opposed to publicising the act as one nauseating proportions against society, making us all feel a sense of public responsibility.





Fig.28 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Heads of State*, Screen Print on Paper (1997-99)

*Heads of State* (Fig.28) brought attention to the rising death toll, with a conspiracy theory in tow of the authorities redistributing certain communities with hand guns and crack cocaine seized from previous police raids. In order to effectively communicate the powerful message behind the piece, I created a space that exacerbated a feeling of confrontation and entrapment. Drawing on James Turrell *Chapel* I was able to embed a sense of helplessness and a harsh lived reality that this life is inescapable, the viewer would also be entrapped and immersed in that pain. I recreated the experience of being in a morgue. The walls were lined with images, screen-printed onto paper, depicting body bags in fridges.



Fig.29 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Heads of State*, Installation (1997-99)

Their identities were masked to highlight equality, as we all make this rite of passage. The physical space of the installation was neutralised; the sensorial experience was achieved by dropping the temperature of the room; the lighting was reduced significantly so that the edges of the space were rendered invisible. The floor was mopped with formaldehyde each morning to keep the clinical stillness and spirit of emptiness. This show pioneered my first attempt in the re-configuration of space such that the walls that were once perpendicular now converged in the shape of a trapezium. As the walls converged, your world converged, intensifying feelings of confinement. With sight, sense of smell, and mobility impaired, you were subject to an assimilation with death.

*Heads of State* signalled an important departure with regard to controlling how works resonate through the spatial experience, not only through the visual.

The effect was to enhance the visual element, by removing normal reality and placing the viewer in my own.

*I am interested in what I call 'little memory', Boltanski explains, an emotional memory, an everyday knowledge, the contrary of the Memory with a capital M that is preserved in history books. This little memory, which for me is what makes us unique, is extremely fragile, and it disappears with death. This loss of identity, this equalisation in forgetting, is very difficult to accept. The island is going to be the island of death and in the end the piece is not about life, but about death<sup>25</sup>.*

Christian Boltanski's *Island of Death* is a stark reminder of all that is profound about this rite of nature. He recorded the heart beats of over 30,000 people. These recordings are housed in a booth on an uninhabited island of Teshima in Japan. Visitors are encouraged to contribute their own recording to bolster the already expansive archive of the driving force of humankind – clearly a polar opposite to *Heads of State*, which gives permanence about the trauma of death through the click of the camera shutter, mirroring the click of an illegal handgun that has caused the subject to transform their state of existence to eternal rest.

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<sup>25</sup> Christian Boltanski, *Island of Death*, 2012  
<http://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/events/2012/march/12/christian-boltanskis-island-of-death/>

## 6

## Goldfinger

Sitting in the National Museum of Rome under soft lighting, cool, pensive and scarred, is *'The Boxer of Quirinal'*. He may be by Apollonios, the Athenian sculptor who carved the famous Belvedere Torso. Whether or not they are the work of the same man, the bronze-caster who made the boxer (Fig.30) seems to have sculpted from life a professional athlete rather than an amateur who competed for honour at Olympia, suppressing the Greeks' urge to idealise, beautify and indulge in what Picasso called "lies".



Fig.30 Artist Unknown, *The Boxer of Quirinal*, Bronze (330 BC)

He is not likely to have wandered into the artist's establishment after a bout in search of some artefact to decorate the walls of his home, but it is not hard to imagine the two men, from two different walks of life, in an exchange.

*Fraternising, exchanging news and views, and gaining an appreciation of the other's work, life and the sacrifices each makes for his art.*<sup>26</sup>

It is this notion of Olympia, the chief sanctuary of the gods where malevolence is played out for pain and pleasure, and the value-judgement that victory enables you to have status and reputation linked purely to a physical act, reactivated my interest in a particular social group. This very tenuous link ran through numerous works, in particular *I Wanna Kill Sam*, obsessed with representation of local rap icons and mirrored years later with *Grave Diggaz*, which was comprised of international rap icons that sited death as celebratory, shedding oneself of the stresses of life. *Innocence Protects You* and *An Affair of Honour* disrupted notions of what are the silent stories behind Museums collections, in particular the Horniman and National Maritime Museum. All the works made some comment on morality, perception and an invisible nihilism by a society selfishly consuming whoever stumbles into its path.

Feeling the warmth of the gaze from a curious middle-class society that selfishly claimed to understand the street, I turned the table in a moment of enlightenment. Speaking with Jason Jules over a virgin Mojito at the Great Eastern Hotel, he questioned the quality and relevance of surface in my previous work. Suspiciously, my mind quickly ran the data, thinking about the bronze Quirinal boxer I had seen all those years ago, slumped but capable of inflicting instantaneous discomfort, coupled with the flashbacks of Ice Cube

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<sup>26</sup> Professor Jody Maxim, An interview at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, November, 2010



walking across the stage at the Brixton Academy singing '*Dam, I Wanna Kill Sam*'. The kaleidoscopic cocktail of my slumped pugilist coupled with Cube's oratory truculence, I moved back into Jason's world, I had missed possibly 3 minutes of his question/statement and as I phased in again, he asked about the precious metals – in particular, gold. It was as if the angels had sounded and I was seated at the feet of the holy one. The sculptor, the pugilist, the artist, the gangster – what was the difference, all being remembered in perpetuity?

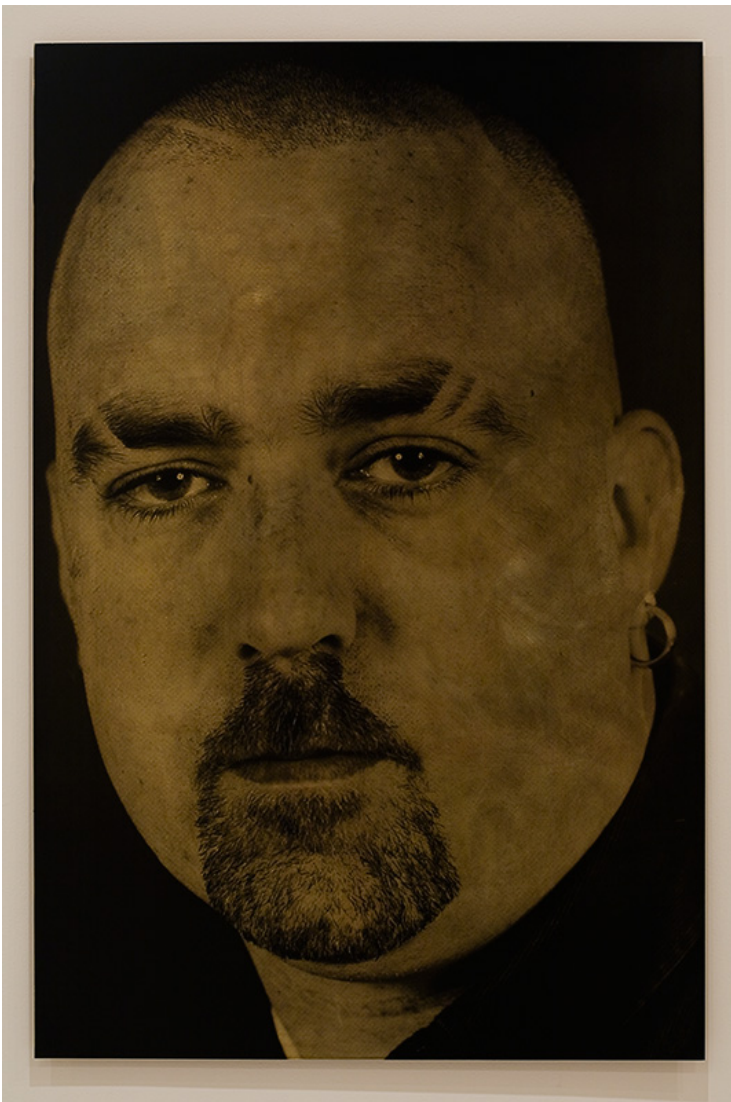


Fig.31 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Goldfinger*, Screen Print 24 Carat Gold (2007)



Permanence being at the forefront of the imaginative process *Goldfinger*, (Fig32) was realised moments after my conversation with Jason Jules. The roots were my Olympian pugilist which sat in the Terme Museum slumped but carefully rendered by the sculptor which gave him life as if he was pausing for a breathe.

The conversations that took place between artist and subject seemed collaborative purely through the gaze but more importantly the mutual trust knowing he the '*Boxer of Quirinal*' would be rendered for eternity in the canon of the history of art. The local barber-shop was the new sculptors studio, I was the sculptor and shaper of ideas and my pugilist was now Phil Jones and Mitch Pyle the portal to the self entitled British Mafia.



Fig.32 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Goldfinger*, (Installation) Screen Print 24 Carat Gold (2007)

*It was through Goldfinger that Abdu'Allah performed the role of alchemist, seeming to transform a base metal into something of immense value whilst personally experiencing the dazzling seductiveness of this most precious of metals. Goldfinger, for example, allows*

*us to read the works not as a monument to decadence, but as a product of alchemical redemption. In listening to Abdu'allah discuss his pieces, particularly those which involve photographic portraiture, it is clear that, for him, the photograph captures more than just the physical body and appearance.*

*It has, he believes, the ability to capture that person's spiritual essence<sup>27</sup>.*

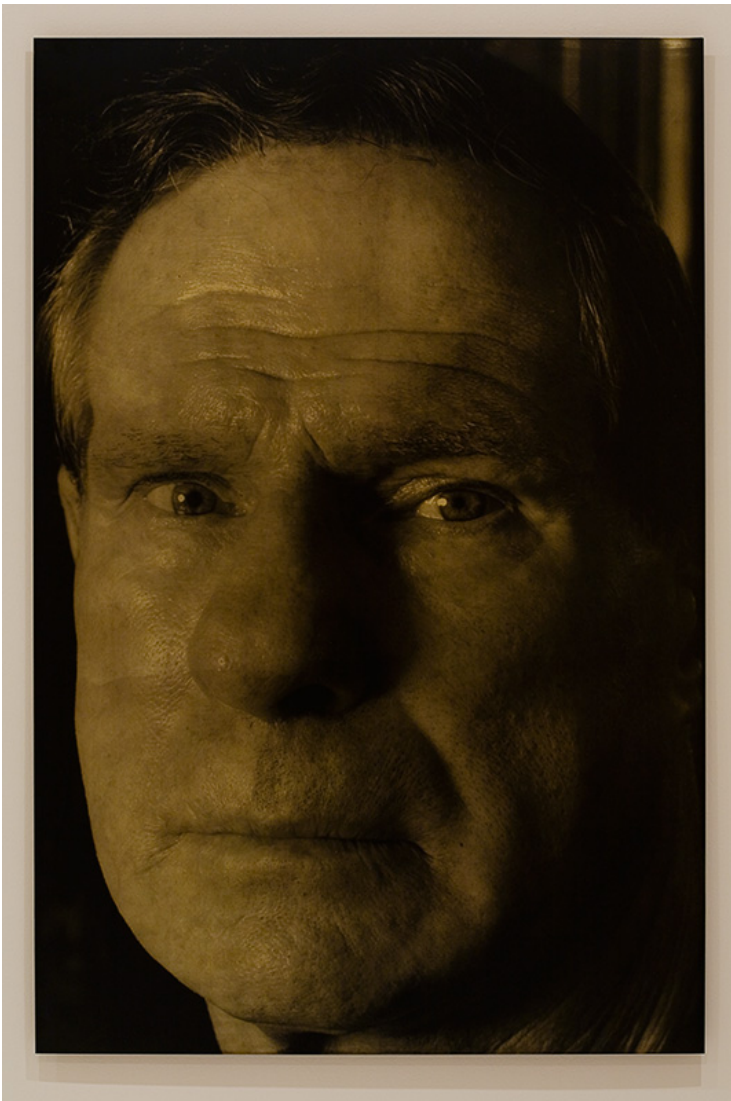


Fig.33 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Goldfinger*, Screen Print 24 Carat Gold (2007)

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<sup>27</sup> Rachel Newman *The Art of Dislocation* (2010)

*Goldfinger* brought together ways in which violence has been represented in the history of Western thought. The piece built upon Plato's rejection of form of mimetic practices such as poetry, painting, sculpture and music as tools for the manipulation of human emotion and views that fear and desire are seen as irrational because they undermine our mental self-control.<sup>28</sup> I view Plato's rejection of all dramatic forms as a rejection of straight literary



Fig.34 Faisal Abdu'Allah, *Goldfinger Burretta*, 24 Carat Gold (2007)

association with images of violence and over-sensationalized representation. Plato's advocacy for a more conceptual use of art and representation that can be recognized in the conceptual narrative resonated with me, but more importantly I understood the process of becoming, of reinterpreting the knowledge of one's art history legacy within a specific contextual socio-political realm to be a fundamental part of the my new creative process.

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<sup>28</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, pp. 38-110.

## Conclusion

*Mirror to my Thoughts* has been the anthology which has assembled my thoughts and studio practice. The onset was to clearly define the critical frame work that has illustrated black modernity, but more importantly my very own. I drew upon African and American histories that were seen through the every day realities commencing with my early childhood memories. This journey has help uncover six stages of my evolutionary process, malevolence through *I Wanna Kill Sam*, redemption in *Revelations*, enlightenment in *The Garden of Eden*, ascension in *Heads of State*, essentialism in *Thalatha Haqq* and cold utopias of *Goldfinger*. Despite these kaleidoscopic conditions my intent and sense of purpose has always remained consistent, to simply tell the truth with a cohesive determination.

Frank Bowling and Eddie Chambers have been instrumental in shaping the social consciousness of post war Britain. The Black Arts Movement inspired landmark exhibitions *The Other story*, *Transforming the Crown* and seminal publications *The Black Atlantic* and *Shades of Black*. Their experience in the discourse of prejudice, rights and entitlements are sentiments that echo from the very first steps my father took as he innocently was looking for a room to rent. The road map to creating more connected society has been written, the blueprints have been left by the artisans of antiquity.

Mirror to my thoughts enabled me to surpass my expectation as I uncovered varying narratives that formed the Black Arts Movement and on reflection acknowledged the viral influence it has had on contemporary arts practice.

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## Appendices 1.

### Faisal Abdu'Allah CV

Born London 1969  
Lives and works in London  
Nationality, British  
Invited Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts

#### Education

1988-1991 BA Fine Art, Central St. Martin's College, London  
1989 Massachusetts College of Art, Boston  
1991-93 MA Fine Art, Royal College of Art, London  
2012 University of East London PHD

#### Awards

1994 Individual Artist Award, London Arts Board  
2004 Chrisi Bailey award prize, Iniva and A-space  
2004-2005 Individual Artist Award, Decibel (Arts Council)  
2006 Grant for the Arts  
2007 First Prize at the Tallinn Print Triennale, Estonia  
2012 Mayor of London Award for Sustainability

#### Residencies

2010 Stanford University. USA  
2009 National Portrait Gallery. London  
2008-09 Gallery Momo. South Africa  
2008 Tate Britain. London  
2007 Serpentine Gallery. London  
2007 Tate Modern. London  
2007 British Film Institute. London  
2007 Chestnut Grove School. London  
2006 Project Row Houses, Houston. USA  
2005 Artist Residence, Serpentine Gallery. London  
2004 Walsall Gallery. Walsall  
2003 Camden Arts Centre. London  
2001 Horniman Museum. London  
2001 National Maritime Museum. London

#### Solo Exhibitions (selected)

2012 CAAM, *The Art of Dislocation*. Spain (book\*)  
2010 Stanford Welton Gallery, *The Art of Dislocation*. USA (cat\*)  
2009 Whitechapel Art Gallery, *W.H.I.T.E.* London  
2009 National Portrait Gallery, *Chasing Mirrors*. London  
2008 BFI Gallery, *The Browning of Britannia*. London (cat\*)  
2007 Café Gallery, *Goldfinger*. London  
2006 Iniva, *Threshold*. London  
2003 Chisenhale Gallery, *The Garden of Eden*. London Touring. (cat\*)  
2002 Horniman Museum, *Innocence Protects you*. London  
2002 National Maritime Museum, *An Affair of Honour*. London (cat \*)  
2001 The Agency Contemporary Art, *Last Supper*. London

### Group Exhibitions (selected)

2009 Museum of Docklands, *Landfall*. London  
 2008 Tate Britain, *Nahnou*. London  
 2007 Hastings Museum, *Yes Yes Y'all*. Hastings  
 2007 Novas Contemporary Urban Centre, *Dream Home*. London  
 2006 Serpentine Gallery, *Diss-assembly*. London (cat\*)  
 2004 Xippas Gallery, *Britannia Works*. Athens, Greece (cat\*)  
 2003 Sharjah Biennial, *Sharjah Biennial*. United Arab Emirates (cat\*)  
 2003 Camden Art Centre, *Image Conscious*. London (cat\*)  
 2003 INIVA *The Veil*. London (book\*) (touring exhibition)  
 2003 MOMA, Oxford (cat\*)

### Public Art Commission

2006 South Kilburn Estate  
 2002 Chiltern Sculpture Park (book\*)  
 1996 Stonebridge Adventure Playground

### Press/TV (selected)

2010 Stanford Daily, review by Alex Fialo  
 2009 Flash Art, review  
 2008 Art Monthly, The Browning of Britannia, review  
 2008 New Statesman, Faisal Abdu'Allah, Artists tackle ten existential questions  
 2008 Time out, Faisal Abdu'Allah, In the Studio section, review  
 2008 BBC Radio 4, Midweek, hosted by Hardeep Singh Kohli  
 2008 CNN, Diss-assembly, review  
 2006 Frieze, Are you being served? By Tom Morton  
 2006 Time Out, Threshold, review  
 2006 Time Out, Diss-assembly, review  
 2005 The Guardian, Faisal Abdu'Allah, feature  
 2004 BBC London Radio, Threshold, review  
 2004 A-n Magazine, interview with Rohini Malik  
 2003 Time Out, Garden of Eden, review  
 2003 Art in America, Still Lives, review by Roy Huxley  
 2002 Untold Magazine, Faisal Abdu'Allah, feature by Tessa Card  
 2001 The Guardian, Faisal Abdu'Allah, Maritime Museum  
 2001 BBC2, Faisal Abdu'Allah in conversation with Prince Charles, Maritime Museum  
 2001 BBC2, Harlesden, featured, TV documentary  
 2000 Flash Art International, Still Life, review by Roy Exley

### Collections

Arts Council England, London  
 CAAM, Spain  
 Celebrity Cruises, Los Angeles, USA  
 Museum Lagrafique, Italy  
 National Maritime Museum, London  
 Royal Armouries, London  
 Victoria & Albert Museum, London

## Appendices 2.

### List websites, catalogues and books

#### Websites:

##### Artist News Letter

[http://www.a-n.co.uk/artists\\_talking/image\\_bank/single/22820](http://www.a-n.co.uk/artists_talking/image_bank/single/22820)

<http://www.exacteditions.com/exact/search.do?term=FAISAL+ABDU%27ALLAH&issuelid=&titleid=351&sort=0&type=magazine>

##### Barber Cultural Space

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/audioslideshow/2011/sep/22/faisal-barbers-harlesden-london-audio-slideshow>

##### Barber collaboration artist Oreet Ashery

[http://www.othergallery.com.cn/news/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=93&Itemid=58&lang=en](http://www.othergallery.com.cn/news/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=93&Itemid=58&lang=en)

##### BBC Radio 4

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/factual/midweek\\_20080213.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/factual/midweek_20080213.shtml)

##### BLK Group

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BLK\\_Art\\_Group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BLK_Art_Group)

##### Commercial

<http://www.autograph-abp.co.uk>

##### Garden of Eden

<http://www.culture24.org.uk/art/sculpture+%26+installation/art17971>

##### Gateway to Faisal Websites

<http://pipl.com/directory/name/Abdu'allah/Faisal/>

##### Goldfinger

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bYMPPrN7cYk>

[http://www.wpr.org/hereonearth/archive\\_111219k.cfm](http://www.wpr.org/hereonearth/archive_111219k.cfm)

##### Heads of State

##### I Wanna Kill Sam

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2001/jun/30/features.jobsmoney4>

##### Face Magazine

<http://archive.tribunemagazine.co.uk/article/9th-july-1993/9/off-the-streets-and-into-the-barbers>

##### Islam

<http://insideislam.wisc.edu/index.php/archives/11595>

##### Last Supper

<http://www.magnoliaeditions.com/artists/faisal-abduallah/>  
<http://www.culture24.org.uk/spliced/objects/tra62387>

### **On the Bright Side Publication and Exhibition**

<http://www.victorsloan.com/2012/01/return-to-news-archive-on-bright-side.html>

### **Over view**

<http://www.magnoliaeditions.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/MagnoliaIntroduction.pdf>

<http://www.magnoliaeditions.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/MagnoliaNewsletter22.pdf>

### **Tate Encounters**

<http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/tate-encounters/edition-6/>

### **Thalatha Haqq**

[http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1341\\_black\\_british\\_style/the\\_exhibition/related\\_collections\\_detail.php?id=11&sellImage=3](http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1341_black_british_style/the_exhibition/related_collections_detail.php?id=11&sellImage=3)

## Catalogues and Books\*

- 2012 On the Art of Dislocation. pub CAAM, Spain\*
- 2010** The Art of Dislocation. pub Stanford University
- 2007 Political / Poetical, Eve Kask, pub. Kumu Kunstmuseum, Tallinn, Estonia
- 2007 The Nature of the Beast, Cultural Diversity and The Visual Sector, A Study of policies, initiatives and attitudes 1976 – 2006, Richard Hylton, pub. ICIA, Bath\*
- 2007 Life Is More Important Than Art, pub. By Ostrich, London\*
- 2006 Art Of Collaboration, Vivienne Reiss, London\*
- 2006 Engage 18, Gallery Education as Research by Faisal Abdu'Allah, Winter Issue
- 2005 Garden of Eden, Faisal Abdu'allah, published by Autograph with the support ACE\*
- 2005 Magic Moments, by Anna Harding, pub. Black Dog, London\*
- 2004 Private Views, Judith Palmer, Serpents Trail ed.\*
- 2004 God & the Gangs, Dr Robert Beckford (cover) ed.
- 2003 Art and Photography, Ian Farr, Phaidon press
- 2003 Hackney Wick, Lucy McMenemy, pub. The Learning Trust, London
- 2002 Turin Biennale Catalogue
- 2000 Warning shots, Contemporary art exploring themes of conflict & violence, Vaughan Allen, Royal Armouries Museum, ed. Clifford Press, Coventry
- 2000 LKW, Paolo Bianchi, Kunsthalle Bregenz, Verlag Buchhandlung Walter Koenig, Cologne\*
- 1999 LKW, Paolo Bianchi, OK Centrum fur Gegenwartskunst ed., Ritter Verlag
- 1999 Missing Link, The Human Image in Photography, Christoph Doswald, Bern\*
- 1998 Faisal Abdu'Allah, Heads of State, Nicholas Barker, Fourth Dial ed., London\*
- 1998 They Don't Know Me But..,  
De La Warr Pavilion, Brighton, Winchester art gallery, Pitshanger Manor, London
- 1997 Transforming the Crown, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York\*
- 1997 The 90s: A Family of Man, Forum de l' Art Contemporain, Luxembourg\*
- 1997 Invisible Light, Chrissie Isles and Russell Roberts, MOMA ed., Oxford\*
- 1997 Out Of the Blue, Anne Barlow, Glasgow Museums ed.
- 1996 Radical Images, Werner Fenz, Neue Galerie ed., Austria
- 1996 The Impossible Science of Being, The Photographers Gallery, Leeds Museum Gallery, Brighton Museum
- 1995 Make Believe, Royal College of Art, London\*
- 1995 Presences, The Photographers' Gallery, London
- 1994 Different Stories, (Photo International), Netherlands Photo Institute, Rotterdam
- 1994 Us An Dem, The Storey Institute, Lancashire
- 1993 Censored, Nigger to Nubian, 198 Gallery, London

